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ABSTRACT

A research project aimed to show the rationale, procedure, and implications of an interdisciplinary multimedia-hypertext for composition research. The project, undertaken for 2 semesters, was for an English 102 "Writing about Literature" course which also looked to improve students' writing and critical thinking skills. In a classroom "experiment," heterogeneous groups of three to four students were chosen based upon their computer literacy skills and strengths already demonstrated as readers and writers. Students read, wrote journal entries, discussed works, and formed groups to discuss their ideas and pick a topic. Three class sessions met in the computer lab, using the Linkway Live software program, where students began drafting and practicing the different hypertext features, made decisions on such questions as what should their introduction and thesis on the first page be, and divided the labor among themselves based on members' strengths. Results indicated that this motivated students to work on their projects, taught them new ways to communicate and navigate, engaged them in collaborative problem solving, and offered critical thinking in action. Findings suggest that disadvantages included the limits of the software program caused frustrations, the time lost away from the classroom and direct study, and the work in some groups was not shared equally. (An evaluative form is appended; contains five references.) (CR)

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ED 402 610

USING MULTIMEDIA -HYPERTEXT IN A COMPOSITION CLASS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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We hope to show the rationale, procedure and implications of our interdisciplinary multimedia- hypertext for composition research project. We have worked on this project for twc semesters, and we have just finished our second classroom "experiment"

I. We set up this project for a number of reasons and to test out the following hypotheses:

1. to successfully design a multimedia-hypertext project for an Eng. 102/ writing about literature course--because:

a. we both agree with researchers such as L.M. Dryden who writes in Literacy and Computers that "hypertext by virtue of its associative, multilinear branching and linking, offers a powerful medium for an expanded notion of literacy"(285).

b. students could learn this program quickly through a basic tutorial and class could be conducted in the academic computing lab over the course of two weeks.

2. to enable students to make strides in their writing and critical thinking skills--because:

a. they would have the opportunity, working together in small groups, to discuss their ideas and make connections between the readings, create storyboards(conceptual outlines)

b. the hypertext program itself could serve as a form of talk and writing, where students' decisions simultaneously become visible as they produce their documents; they can demonstrate their ideas verbally and visually and they become designers as well as writers

3. to assess the success of the project and student learning in a number of different ways--because:

a. we set up performance objectives with student consent

b. the hypertext program allows for peer response while students are drafting their texts

c. students completed self and group evaluations

d. students wrote individual written essays on the same topic

II. Procedures:

1. Literature/Composition background: in this course students are reading and writing around the major theme of "Frames of Mind" The readings are divided into thematic clusters: fantasy/reality, madness/sanity, schooling/education. The multimedia project took place 5 weeks into the semester, when students were reading stories and poems relating to the theme of "madness"(Poe's"The Tell-Tale Heart," Gilman's"The Yellow Wallpaper," Browning's"Porphyria's Lover," Dickinson's "Much Madness Is Divinest Sense," Nayoya' "Han's Crime," Plath's "Lady

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Lazarus"). Students read, wrote journal entries, discussed works and formed groups to discuss their ideas and pick a topic. The discussions continued in the classroom and in the computer lab where we met during 3 class sessions.

The heterogeneous groups of 3-4 students were carefully chosen based on: students' computer literacy skills and strengths already demonstrated as readers and writers.

2. Linkway Live software program-- students asked to do tutorial on own time

3. Creating storyboards-- students often have difficulty(as we know) with organizing ideas. Here they put into outline form how they visualized their topic, thesis, connections among stories etc.

4. In lab-- students began drafting and practicing the different hypertext features. For example, one group set up a menu page on the objects of obsession that lead to madness and designed a pop-up feature, defining obsession, and a link button that directs the reader to the stories, "The Tell Tale Heart" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" and to pictures of the objects of obsession, the "vulture eye" and the wallpaper.

a. students made decisions,such as: what should our introduction and thesis on first page be? what icons should we use for each question or each story? what are the major points for the story page and minor points for the pop-ups or links to pictures or definitions?

b. students divided the labor, depending on members's strengths: the artists drew and visualized the ideas, others collected the quotes to support points made, others perfected storyboards

c. time out during 3rd session for presentation of each groups' projects. Students viewed the hypertext documents on the computer screens and made comments right on the screen. Then students had some time to finish and polish

III. Conclusion and Implications for teaching and research:

Perhaps it is true as R. Lanham says in <u>The Electronic Word</u> that "print alone will no loner define the organization and presentation of knowledge as it has for the past five centuries." We do think that more use can be made of computer technology to enhance writing to learn, but we also are aware of the problems in incorporating this technology into a core composition course. Although we haven't found a magical, or curative tool for learning we have succeeded in finding out more about what this medium can do for us and for our students. Here are some of the major advantages and disadvantages we have found, including some student evaluations of this project.

Advantages:

1.it motivates students--most students willingly worked on their projects before and after class time; they met together and

individually came to the lab. Some came early and stayed late.

2. electronic text creates for students not only a new writing space but a new educational space as well; working in the lab freed us and students to communicate and navigate in new ways; we succeeded in decentering the classroom and students took on more of the responibility for their learning.

3. students, collaborating in groups engaged in higher level problem solving. One student noted in his evaluation: "The advantages of working together are you can split the responsibilities and you gain different perspectives." Another commented that in his follow-up essay writing: "I was able to show both sides of an issue in a new way."

4. critical thinking in action--as students organized materials, created and interpreted graphic and textual images together. A student wrote: "I thought about the topics in a visual sense and I wa able to transfer images from my head to the computer...I gained new insights because I was able to separate my thoughts and re-combine them in different ways."

5. The interdisciplinary collaborating and team teaching enriched our learning and understanding of literature, composition and computer technology, and, we think, enhanced the students' learning environment.

Disadvantages:

1. time factor--time away from classroom and direct study. And abbreviated time for students to become fully comfortable with program.

2. technology factor--limits of Linkway Live program, frustrations, glitches, lack of technical support when students came to lab on own time

3. not all groups worked as well together, especially during the fall semester. A few students resented carrying their groups if they worked with students who they felt were not as reliable or who were not sharing "the load" A few of the most competent students noted that they would like to do a project like this again, but on their own, individually.

Conclusion: We now want to look at the follow-up essays, and to develop other interdisciplinary approaches to incorporating technology into a composition class. We would like to work on having students create their own home pages on the World Wide Web network and to research and evaluate the Internet.

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Appendix A-- Evaluation of Group Multimedia Project

Name: Names of Group Members:

I. Using the media:
1.a) What did you like about using this form of media to communicate your ideas?

b) What didn't you like?

2. a) What did you learn from doing this project? What new insights did you gain?

b) Were you able to think about the topics in a different way?

3. Whould you like to work on another multimedia project? Please explain why or why not?

II. The group process:

1. a) How satisfied are you with your group's effort in accomplishing the task?

b) What are the advantages and disadvantages of working together in this way?

2. How successful is your group's finished product? On a scale of 1-4(4 being best) how would you rate it?

3. What could have been done to make this a better group project?